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Free

In Defense of Fictional Teenage Girls

Samantha King writes about the depection of teenage girls in film & television.

There's a worrying trend within popular films and television shows, particularly within the action and drama genre: the demonisation of the teenage girl. This character is often called "vapid", "annoying", "shallow", "useless", "whiny" - and the list goes on. Sometimes she's the daughter of the main character. Sometimes she's the main character herself. It makes no difference, really. The point is: the audience despises her.

But why the teenage girl? Finding the kid characters to be annoying and obnoxious isn't really a new thing, but why doesn't there some to be this same vile vilification for the onscreen teenage boys? The obvious answer would be misogyny, from both the audience and the adult male writers who usually write these parts. Young girls are widely mocked on a daily basis by society for the most trivial of things, such as liking boybands and certain fashion trends, so it sadly comes as no surprise to find this ignorant mentality bleeding into the mainstream media as well.

One of the most common tropes in both cinema and television is the exhaustingly outdated 'damsel in distress' cliche, which sees the teenage daughter being kidnapped resulting in her big, tough, "badass" father having to come to her rescue. Aside from this plot device having been done to death (see: Taken, 24, Die Hard 4.0, Commando, White House Down, Transformers: Age of Extinction), it also goes hand in hand with the trope of the "bitchy" teenage daughter giving her father a rough time and not appreciating him enough. Audiences are made to see the (oft badly and underwritten) daughter as an

irritating nuisance to her dad whom we are supposed so sympathise with, and the cycle of sexism continues.

Femininity is also just as vilified with onscreen girls as it is offscreen. Take Sansa and Arya Stark from the TV fantasy series Game of Thrones, for example. The character of Arya rejects the typically feminine characteristics that were more expected of women in the time period the show is set in, instead choosing to look and act more like what would have been expected of boys; she has therefore been hailed as a "badass" by audiences everywhere, and is unsurprisingly a fan favourite. Sansa, on the other hand, practically embodies femininity: she adores dresses, abhors violence and dreams of nothing more than being a mother and a wife to a noble knight (in the first couple of seasons, at least). The complete opposite of her younger sister, she is sadly seen as weak by this same audience, and so enters the old familiar terms frequently used to describe her: "annoying", "useless", "pathetic", "stupid". So, according to the Game of Thrones fanbase - which is a very, very big fanbase - masculinity equals good, and femininity equals bad. Get the picture yet?

Sexuality in teenage girls is another rarity onscreen. Normally when girls my age are sexualised in the media, it's hardly ever within their own control. They're usually either being shown as an object for the male gaze (Transformers), being raped (Game of Thrones), or punished for their sexual desires to the point that it's even become a trope within the horror genre ("virgins never die!"). Meanwhile boys are shown masturbating onscreen left, right and centre (Skins, American Pie, The Inbetweeners) and it's always treated as a fairly trivial subject matter, because male sexuality isn't seen as a taboo. The media has an enormous impact on the way young people see themselves, so by censoring female sexuality onscreen we're also repressing it offscreen as well. Case in point: I wasn't aware girls could even masturbate until I was fifteen years old, as I'd only ever seen boys do it on TV or in films; neither were several of my friends. That simply isn't right.

If there's one film that gets it right on the money in its depiction of the teenage girl, it's Mean Girls. Not only does it accurately reflect the way we behave and treat each other, it also sends out a message that we shouldn't shame each other for who we are, and that we shouldn't be shamed by society for who we are either. Buffy the Vampire Slayer and The Hunger Games are other great examples of how we should be represented onscreen: both present us with strong protagonists in the form of a teenage girl that also show the audience their vulnerable - and feminine - moments without ever shaming them for it. It's refreshing, and it's necessary for the modern audience who continue to react in disgust towards these portrayals…

This is an excerpt. To read the full article, head to tyci.org.uk. For more of Samantha's writing, visit samxnthaking.wordpress.com.

A BLOODY MESS

Kate Bailey writes about her weird fascination with our monthly cycles...

I was reading a lot about periods, and realised I knew nothing about the bloody mess we're dealing with.

Why am I so fascinated by periods? They were socially taboo for so long now I'm talking about intimate traumas of the monthly ordeal with friends, and strangers in the bathroom of the pub? It's as if I have awakened the 9-year-old in me, who struggled to understand the absurdity of humans having to pay for toilet paper and nappies because it just seemed like shit people needed to survive…

Here's what I know about periods: I spend 12 weeks a year having one. Many people believe we had inadequate care or classification for menstrual care in the context of public health. Many people believe menstruation is not a matter of public health. Menstrual sanitary products can apparently be compared to condoms. Menstruation is biological, and unavoidable - and sexual health is separate of that, in the ballpark, but an exploration and industry of it's own.

It is a social issue. It is a feminist issue. We have to acknowledge we are in this situation because there is an element of female biology we are omitting as a form of health care. It's not even worth the lists of what we do acknowledge, by comparison, because on the merit of the problem itself - it's a FUCKING PROBLEM. It's a social issue because it's "*Women's Business*", it's a social issue because dropping a tampon on the bus is an 'embarrassing' story, it's a social issue because it's been asserted women are less productive than men for five days of the month at work, and therefore, remuneration standards are somehow fair. It's a social issue because

if I take rhetoric to action and stop using any kind of sanitary care, I would be socially ostracised and seen as disgusting.

So, the biggest period related questions since, *"I must have*

misheard you, WHAT DO YOU MEAN I WILL BLEED FOR FIVE DAYS A MONTH UNTIL I AM FUCKING 40? Is this a joke?": Why are subsidised, effective menstrual products are widely unavailable to most women around the world?

Of course, I came across the plethora of dialogue regarding tampon tax, and the various discussion across the world. It's overall very straightforward: women should not want to pay tax for a basic sanitary right. And dudes, do you want to pay tax as well if you have shared income or for your daughters? If governments want to tax our biology, their value model is flawed. What about families with lots of women? Families who live dollar-to-dollar? I, as a white female in her early 20's, seemingly bear a much lessor cost. And are there more important issues? Yep. Yes - there always is. However, this can be changed, so why not change it? There was not really any good reason WHY there isn't subsidised healthcare available, or why it is not a public health issue. Time to ask a different question. But first, and quick **Tellt and Add 'Em to The Shit List** to the concept of government in this context:

Before you get up in my vagina about whether I can decide if I want to have a child or not, could you get up there with a free or subsidised liquid absorbing product that will stop the blood from spilling over my legs as I conduct the business of being a human that was born on this Earth? Born into YOUR system? I didn't sign up for this - where is that contract? Well, there is no contract, I was born and in order to survive I must work and contribute and be apart of it. There is no way in Hell or Menopause that I am just going to accept the terms, because of what you will accept as a need.

So, why would / should / could a government be motivated to provide products to women?

Our governments have taken on the role of protecting and advancing society, and that includes research, development and accessible quality public healthcare. When that healthcare is compromised by availability of means, the government must react with regulation and supplements, especially in the case of social unfairness. Social unfairness is the first element of a government's motivation,

and the second is in the pure interest of the health of the female citizens of their country. To elaborate:

1) Social Unfairness - Even if a government is essentially idle and maintaining a taxation, their apathy perpetuates social unfairness. You need an income and financial means to buy menstrual care products. That means, anyone without an income and anyone without financial means is excluded from sanitary care. Socially, that's unfair. To consider a single mother of four, with three girls, and her monthly cost of providing menstrual care - could we not consider it socially unfair the burden of womanhood remains on the woman? That she must be a consumer of means to care for herself and her female children?

2) Menstruation is a public health matter - there is a wealth of material online about the need for cleanliness and sanitation through a menstrual period. Ideally, women have the correct sized tampon for each volume of flow during their cycle, to avoid toxic shock if only using larger sizes. Women need enough products, because prolonged exposure to damp products leads to irritation, broken skin and infection. During menstruation, women are at a heightened risk of infection. This increase occurs because the mucus that blocks the cervix opens, allowing the blood to pass through your body, but making it possible for bacteria to travel up your uterus and pelvic cavity. To avoid urinary tract and yeast infections, the genitals need to be cleaned properly to avoid any cross contamination. Furthermore, the risk of contracting an STD is heightened, with the added risk of passing or contracting blood borne diseases especially…

So, what's a fair next step?

Well, getting rid of 'pink tax' or 'tampon tax' on menstrual products is a good start. In May 2015, Canada stepped up and abolished their taxes, effective July 2015. Worldwide, there are movements on local and national levels to have tampon taxes abolished. As Canada demonstrated, something as simple as signing a petition is enough… Further abroad, other measures are being taken to see change in developing nations, and perhaps we can interpret a model for government provided menstrual care, with appropriate allocation as health care. For the 'average woman' periods are an inconvenience, mostly, but they should not be an expensive one. And I say inconvenience not for the sake of petulant whining, but rather so we all get that it kinda is, one never reaches the end of the period and think 'Well, that was a fucking joy!'. You know what would be a joy though? Seeing government after government scrapping tampon tax and moving into research and development that could have positive impacts on menstrual care, worldwide.

This is an excerpt. To read the full article, head to tyci.org.uk. For more of Kate's writing, visit littlejoy.de.

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Kelly Dawn Riot

Alice Sawyer interviews the designer about her latest collection.

Irish-born Kelly McGrath is a 26-year-old fashion and textiles designer who goes under the moniker Kelly Dawn Riot. After graduating from Glasgow School of Art, she was announced as winner the 2014 New Designer Award from Scotland Re:Designed. The award, in association with the Love Your Clothes Campaign provided Kelly with mentoring from Orsola De Castro (founder of Fashion Revolution Day), as well as funding and help sourcing recycled fabrics from Zero Waste Scotland. I spoke to Kelly on the launch of her collection and her approach design.

You've just launched your new collection, Formication. Tell us a bit about it.

The collection itself was inspired by traditional naturalist illustrators, so, in keeping with that tradition, I sat in galleries and museums drawing and sketching before painting¬ the images through traditional watercolour techniques. The aim is to create pieces of wearable art that will continue to inspire: crawling with details and minutiae that will never cease to amaze.

The pieces were made using remnants from local Scottish mills, while others were produced in natural fabrics such as cottons and linens, making them strong and durable, while the eco friendly printing techniques and the attention to detail ensure that each piece is a treasure: inspired by nature, designed for life.

As part of your New Designer Award from Scotland Re:Designed, you've been mentored by Orsola de Castro, founder of Fashion Revolution Day and a pioneer of sustainable fashion. What was that like? What has been the lasting legacy of working with her?

Orsola has opened my eyes and completely changed how I view the fashion industry. Being mentored by her has made me aware of the need for all designers large or small to move towards a more eco friendly and sustainable way of producing their garments. Its not about taking on the world it's about doing your own thing but being conscious of its impact and taking measures to reduce your impact while retaining the integrity of your work.

How have your opinions of the fashion industry changed having worked with Orsola and the Love Your Clothes campaign?

It's had the biggest impact on me as both a consumer and a designer. It's really about avoiding fast fashion to me and investing in key pieces that will last longer than throwaway trends. Pieces where you know where the product has been manufactured and produced. Ethical pieces.

I actually visited a clothes recycling plant in Glasgow and I saw clothes piled to the ceiling of a giant warehouse while more trucks were arriving and that was just one plant in Glasgow. It horrified me to see how much we waste and to think of how much damage the earth has faced for these clothes to be just thrown out.

Your work is influenced strongly by nature. What is it about the creatures and plants that moves you?

It's a childhood fascination with nature that just developed. My parents always ensured I had a strong connection with nature. The prints are supposed to be both frightening and beautiful, kind of like how a child first encounters the curiosities of nature. A sense of ephemeral.

Your illustrations are so beautifully detailed. How long does is take to complete an image?

I'm a bit obsessive when it comes to the illustrations. I might redraw the image four times in pencil before I draw it in pen followed by painting it in watercolours. Some can take up to two / three days.

Do you listen to music when working? If so, what's currently playing?

Always! Currently Kelela. The video for the song is stunning too.

You've been living in Glasgow since moving there to study at the Glasgow School of Art. What is your favourite thing to do in the city?

I like to hit the vintage shops and galleries, followed by a big feed in Stereo or Mono. I LOVE the food here.

Kelly's collection is limited and available on a made to order basis. For more information, visit kellydawnriot.wordpress.com.

SEEKING CHANGE & FINDING YOUR PEOPLE

Kate Bailey writes about feminism and community (and has us TYCI gals all totes emosh reading it).

One of the empowering elements of the resurgence in feminism is the sense of community it has been creating. For many of us, the idea of feminism is so closely linked to core values - attached to justice, equality, fairness and respect to humans. So often, subconsciously and otherwise, our values dictate who are, how we act and how we respond. In 2015, we have a unique opportunity: to engage with communities that have been created to service the aforementioned values. Undeniably, it is unity that gives volume to the voice calling for change…

Humans are unlike anything but one another. We need one another. So, we need to stop acting like fairness has room for opinions. We need to stop acting like basic human rights is a negotiation of wealth and rhetoric. We have the opportunity to do that, together, in various ways and mediums. There is a satisfaction and empowerment in doing something because you believe in it - as if, just for a moment, what you're demanding is more important than leaving it as it is - you create change. When we become apart of communities and movements via the sharing of our most intimate values, we become connected to other humans. There's a contagious immensity and empowerment in the cultivation of respect for those in your community, and for the sweeping momentum built by those who believed in something and did something about it; people who are genuinely fulfilled in seeking change on behalf of others.

But why should you do something, when you could do not-something?

…[In] an age where we are communicating more than ever, it's the changes we make and how we speak about them that are the first cogs in mass social change. So, is doing something going to need to be a demand in a life that already demands far too much? No, it just has to be awareness… Even if you influence another through discussion, or you go all

out and join the front line - you, and the world, are better off. The world is a scene right now, and we have the right to demand fairness for ourselves and others.

And, what if you do want to do more? Where do you start?

Find something you respect and involve yourself with a skill set that will contribute, in some way, and that you would enjoy to use. Thinking how to untangle ideation from that idea, there is but one option.

Practical example: I've been writing and making podcasts with TYCI for some time, finding the organisation through some vague Internet meanderings - a podcast recommendation on SoundCloud. When I first connected with TYCI, it barely occurred to me why I wanted to contribute to this over anything else. But, I suppose, finding it through music, it made me feel like feminism was connected to things I value experiencing: music. That I wanted to connect with women making music, because it felt as though there were far too many not receiving recognition.

Despite inherent beliefs in gender equality, I always struggled with how to communicate it and find ways learn more about it. It was the normalised and casual way that TYCI content explored feminism, and the positivity of simply giving representation to women, that seemed to align with a value I never knew I had. In working alongside TYCI, I realised how greatly change relies on individuals making a decision and taking action in support of their values. In doing so, and seeing the work that goes into keeping something like TYCI running, I see a group of people who made the choice and live it everyday, without grandiose or to seek personal gain. The impact of this in my life has been to be aware and motivated, inspired and able to develop a strong voice and understanding in my day-to-day life - because I feel as though such a big part of who I am and what I want to achieve in my life is tied into the values I share with TYCI…

There's comfort in connecting with like-minded people, and empowerment. It's hard for those things to have a negative connotation within your life. Community can be an amazing bridge between values and purpose. If we want to capitalise on recent exposure and progress within feminism (but even, any issue), we must begin with awareness to facilitate change. Find your people. They're out there.

This is an excerpt. To read the full article, head to tyci.org.uk. For more of Kate's writing, keep an eye on our website or visit littlejoy.de.

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